

STATE OF NEBRASKA

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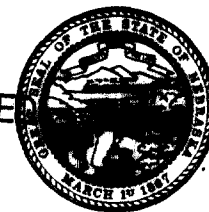
95-176

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED

Tanya D. Wendel
Executive Director

February 1, 1996

EX PARTE OR LATE FILE



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Federal Communications Commission

Office of the Secretary
1919 M Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Sirs:

It is with pleasure that the Nebraska Commission for the Hearing Impaired responds to the "Notice of Inquiry" regarding the benefits of closed captioning of television programming received by 150,000 people in our state who are hard of hearing or deaf.

We will respond to the various paragraphs as follows:

Paragraph 11 -- From our interactions with our constituents we know how valued closed captioning has become. There are approximately 150,000 people who could benefit from the captions in our state. The local TV stations broadcast the news with captions, yet not all of the program is captioned, or real time captioned (excluding the weather most often). Real time is the most desirable so deaf and hard of hearing people are treated as equal to hearing people with the choice of reading the full newscast.

Paragraph 12 -- One additional bonus for having captions of TV programs is that they can be watched without any sound disturbing others. It is useful in situations where a person is in a hospital and does not want to disturb the other person sharing the room. Many people with adverage hearing say how they enjoy seeing the captions when watching music videos because they often cannot understand the words that are sung.

Paragraph 14 - 16 -- Broadcast television is nearly 100% captioned during prime time hours and about half of the daytime shows are now captioned. Cable television is captioning more shows than at this time last year but has a long way to go. In order to expand the services it is necessary to emphasize that it is not a small population of individuals who view captioned TV. People of foreign languages often can read the English language before they can speak it and therefore can use captioning as a way of learning to speak the English language. As mentioned before, there are situations when viewing a TV show without hearing the words is desirable. Children can learn to read as they hear the words and see them on the screen at the same time. It also improves the reading speed of people who are deaf and hard of hearing as they must read fast in order to understand. For deaf and hard of hearing people seeing the correct English language repeatedly aids in learning to write the English language, too.

Cable companies are not as responsive in ensuring that closed captions are sent. Frequently a movie is captioned but for some reason the captions do not show on the screen. Deaf and hard of hearing people pay the same money as anyone else to view Cable and do feel they are being discriminated against.

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In order to expand services, advertisers who want their products to sell could each designate a percentage of their fee towards the captioning of the televised show in which their advertising appears. This way each would carry the burden of costs equally. The company who produces the show also needs to share in that responsibility. With 10% of the population having some degree of hearing loss, that is about 28 million people, and it is realistic to want to accommodate those individuals. What is not always realized is how hearing loss affects individuals participation in society, when the large majority of people with a hearing loss feel left out most of the time from obtaining information from television and movies. They also feel devalued as a person because advertisers do not see them as potential buyers of their products or services. This creates major repercussions in our society as people with a hearing loss have families, work, and want to be treated equally and remain independent. Social services and people of our country take on the responsibility when these wrongs continue, generation after generation. Yes, there should be mandatory captioning!

Paragraph 14 - Market Size and Other Factors

In Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska, local news is passive captioned but not real-time captioned. These are the two largest cities of the state, and televised programs serve a large area of the state. For other areas of Nebraska local news is passive captioned in the North Platte area.

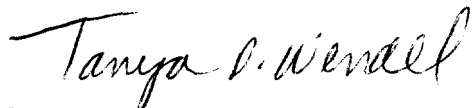
There is a big distinction between what is called passive captioning and real-time captioning. Passive is where only part of the news is captioned, what is prescribed and viewed on the monitor screen for the newscasters to read. When the newscasters make their own comments or when there is a live transmission, or when the weather is telecast, this is not captioned or prescribed and therefore, nothing is viewed in captions. For a hearing person this would be like when you are listening to the news and all of a sudden there is no sound...the same for people reading captions...all of a sudden no captions. Local news stations have a responsibility to provide equal access as well.

Paragraphs 28 - 31 -- There should be no exemptions from mandatory captioning. Television is a business and like all other businesses it is time that all people are treated equally.

Paragraph 33 -- Only occasionally is there a problem with captions being garbled or missing in places when a station is more distant and the general reception of the televised show is not very good.

Thank you for the opportunity to have some input into the future actions of the FCC regarding closed captioning.

Sincerely,



Tanya Wendel
Executive Director

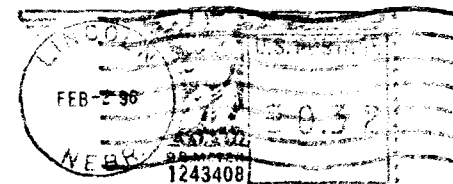
CC: **Mr. Lary Goldberg**
CPB/WGBH National Center for Accessible Media
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